

# Firearm Safety in Times of Community Stress

Firearm safety is recommended by both injury prevention groups and gun rights organizations. It is considered a key element of responsible firearm ownership. There are several reasons why firearm safety is even more critical in times of community stress, when the risk of firearm injury increases.

## Why is community stress a risk factor for firearm injury?

- Children spending more time at home may be more likely to find hidden firearms.
- Unpredictable and stressful times can worsen mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety, leading to thoughts about harming oneself and/or suicidal behavior.<sup>1</sup>
- Unpredictable and stressful times can increase alcohol and substance-use and related disorders, leading to increased risk of accidental firearm injury or suicide.<sup>2</sup>
- Unpredictable and stressful times may lead to increases in intimate partner violence.<sup>3</sup>
- Community stress can lead to substantial increases in firearm sales. New firearm owners may not have had time to receive training on safe firearm handling, loading/unloading, cleaning, or on safe firearm storage.<sup>4</sup>

## Best safety-related practices if you reside in a home with a firearm:

- Store all firearms with a locking device (e.g., cable locks, trigger locks) or use locking containers (e.g., lockboxes, firearm safes, firearm cabinets).
- Store all firearm ammunition in a locked container or safe.
- Do not share the lock combination or key with children or adolescents.
- Do not share the lock combination or key with adults who are at increased risk for suicide or accidental firearm injury (e.g., individuals living with dementia).
- If household members have risk factors for suicide or accidental injury (e.g., depression, alcohol dependence) consider temporarily storing firearms outside of the home.
- Hiding firearms is not an adequate method of securing firearms.<sup>5</sup>
- Studies have shown that children and adolescents often know where household firearms are hidden.

## What should providers do?

Routinely ask patients about their household firearm storage practices, and make recommendations to increase the safe storage of firearms.

## More information for patients and providers:

- VA Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC) [website on suicide prevention and lethal means safety](#).
- VHA and community [trainings on lethal means safety counseling](#).
- National Shooting Sports Foundation & Project ChildSafe [tips on firearm safety](#).



Are you a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one? Connect with the [Veterans Crisis Line](#) to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text 838255, or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/chat](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net/chat)

